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ABSTRACT

The skills that academic leaders perceived to be essential to success in higher education administration were determined through a mail survey. Data were collected from 288 college presidents, academic vice presidents, and deans from state universities and land-grant colleges. It was found that the administrators needed to have strong skills in the communicative, human resource, planning, and self-awareness domains. The skills ranked most essential in the order of importance, include the following: (1) maintaining high standards of ethics, honesty, and integrity in implementing the institution's goals; (2) being honest, open, and dependable in dealing with subordinates; (3) possessing the ability to speak, read, write, and express thoughts in a clear, coherent manner; (4) demonstrating knowledge of institutional resources such as time, personnel, funds, and materials to implement programs; (5) being open to new ideas and suggestions and being able to adjust to meet new situations; (6) possessing stability and objectivity under stress; and (7) being able to respond quickly to unexpected events in large group meetings. Information is provided on the skills ranked least essential to higher education administration and the personal and professional characteristics of the respondents. (SW)

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ABSTRACT OF PAPER

"Skills Perceived to Lead to Success in
Higher Education Administration"

The role of the administrator in institutions of higher education is undergoing significant change. Traditionally, administrators have been drawn from the faculty ranks and have been scholars and teachers, foremost. The tasks of management and the skills required to meet those tasks have been issues secondary to those of academic scholarship. This pattern is changing, however, because of the tremendous pressures felt in the 1980s on the higher education community. Issues such as declining enrollments, declining budgets, and increasing expectations of the student populace, among others, are placing demands upon the academic administrator that are far different today than they were only a decade ago.

In order to cope with such issues, administrators will have to develop expertise in skill areas that encompass, yet go beyond, the traditional training provided for administrators. To define these skill areas, an Administrative Skills Opinionaire was designed which measured the perceptions of academic leaders regarding skills thought to be absolutely essential for success in higher education administration. Skill data was collected from 288 presidents, academic vice presidents, and deans from state universities and land-grant colleges nationally. As a result of information generated from the opinionaire, it was possible to identify those skills perceived to be absolutely essential for success in higher education administration.

It was found that administrators in higher education need to have strong skills in the communicative, human resource, planning, and self-awareness domains. Specific ranked skills are included as a part of this study. Successful administration in institutions of higher learning will evolve from a blending of management and scholarship, and academic management will have to become a respectable component of the higher education community. Administrative training programs during the 1980s must focus on both the art and science of administration as management tools, with specific skill development included as an integral part of the overall administrative educational experience.

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Skills Perceived to Lead to Success in Higher Education Administration

The problem treated in this study was to determine selected factors indicative of the skills believed to be essential for successful administration in higher education as perceived by selected university administrators. Demands on the academic administrator are different today than they were only a decade ago, yet the pressure to "succeed" is a constant one. As colleges and universities face declining enrollments, decreased levels of funding, new expectations from a more sophisticated populace, and increased demands from within the higher education community itself, the mandate to be successful becomes even more critical.

However, before administrators in higher education can hope to be optimally successful, it is imperative that an understanding of the factors contributing to that success be reached. The administrator should be familiar with those skills which lead to self-actualization and ultimately, to success. Academic administrators may not be educated to succeed, and managers-in-training may not be sufficiently prepared to assume successful administrative roles in educational settings. Success too often occurs through "seat-of-the-pants" administration and sometimes in spite of, not because of, the administrator. This is unfortunate

because many factors contributing to success in higher education administration can be isolated and interpreted and need not be left to chance.

Educators currently performing administrative tasks should be among those persons best able to gauge the effectiveness of their job performance and should be able to recognize and report those strengths and skills which they believe are essential for successful administration in higher education. In order to identify those factors indicative of success in the academic realm of higher education, selected presidents, academic vice presidents, and academic deans were asked to report skills or factors they considered to be essential to succesful academic administration. An analysis of the sample's responses provided a substantive, if not conclusive, listing of skills perceived to lead to success in higher education administration. Such a listing will be helpful in addressing the question of what constitutes success in administration and what factors are required to support it.

Research Methodology

The data base for this study was gathered from a survey of the presidents, academic vice presidents, and deans of arts and sciences, business, and education at state universities and land-grant colleges as identified in the 1980-81 Education Directory, Colleges and Universities (Smith & Davis, 1981). An opinionnaire was designed to enable selected policy level administrators to identify

and assign values to skills perceived to be essential to successful administration in higher education. Through the use of a modified Likert-scale methodology, the respondents were asked to rank the most essential skills contributing to successful administration. From the resultant ordering, a consensus of the 10 most essential and the 10 least essential factors contributing to success in higher education administration are presented.

The factors of success included on the rating scale were based on reliable sources gathered from a thorough review of the literature and from a panel of experts in higher education administration. A field test of the scale was conducted. The attitude scale was administered to 30 administrators in higher education. Following the field test, the scale was administered to the population of 576 presidents, academic vice presidents, and academic deans via mail and a 50% response rate was assumed adequate for the purposes of proving the study statistically significant. Failing a 50% return on the initial mailing, a telephone follow-up of nonrespondents (randomly selected) was conducted until the desired level of response had been reached. A follow-up study of the nonrespondents was not a part of this project.

A statistical evaluation of all items included on the opinionnaire was conducted. Values were assigned to

each skill based on the numerical designation of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in the following manner:

1 = Absolutely Essential

2 = Essential

3 = Desirable, but not essential

4 = Not Essential

5 = Undecided

Respondents were asked to rank functional skills in the range from 1-5, assigning to each skills the degree of intensity felt toward each skill. A factor analysis of the instrument was conducted. Descriptive statistics of the sample's ratings have been calculated by mean and frequency. Skills were ranked on the basis of mean results, and the median used to break ties between skills. A measure of concordance was utilized to define levels of agreement among the skills. Chi-square anaylsis was performed to test for independence between skill responses and the following variables:

1. Perceptions of male/female respondents
2. Respondents' age
3. Respondents' level of education
4. Perceptions of presidents, academic vice presidents, and academic deans (arts and sciences, business, and education)
5. Respondents' years in administration

6. Respondents' years of full-time faculty experience
7. Number of postsecondary institutions at which employed
8. Black/nonblack institution
9. State/land-grant institution

The findings of this research in conjunction with the findings from a review of the literature (too lengthy to be summarized here) provided the basis for the summary, conclusions, recommendations, and implications for the measurement of success in higher education administration and practical applications of success factors on the job and in the classroom.

Limitations of the Study

In interpreting data and findings from this study, several limitations must be considered. The data base for the study was limited to state university and land-grant college presidents, academic vice presidents, and selected academic deans as defined in the 1980-81 Education Directory, Colleges and Universities (Smith & Davis, 1981). Input was not obtained from other policy level administrators at these institutions. Moreover, a corresponding sample from independent, proprietary, or two-year institutions was not obtained.

Because the study involved the use of a mail survey, the data base was limited by the willingness of the president, the academic vice president, and the academic dean(s) to complete and return the rating scale. A follow-up study of the population not responding to the survey instrument

was not made. Therefore, the opportunity for refinement of responses is a delimitation as is the opportunity to evaluate the nonrespondents.

The criteria for success in higher education administration as defined by this study were presented from the vantage-point of the president, academic vice president, and selected academic dean(s) from state universities and land-grant colleges only. The study did not attempt to show a correlation between these criteria and criteria that could be generated from other policy level administrators at the same institutions or from "like" administrators at independent, proprietary, or two-year schools. Consequently, generalizations from the responses are discouraged. The factors which help to define success, as presented in this study, are those skills which appear to occur with a high degree of frequency in academic administration at state universities and land-grant colleges.

Although the variables of the study represent a limited number of the possible contributors to success in higher education administration, no attempt has been made to examine the relative contributions of other variables that may lead to success as an administrator (such as personal and professional background, institutional health, or serendipity). To measure the external/internal constraints on effective performance and how that performance influences the success or failure of an administrator is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Conclusions

Conclusions were drawn using a combination of information from both the demographic and skill sections of the opinionnaire. The conclusions include general findings describing the characteristics of academic administrators in state universities and land-grant colleges and specific findings naming the 10 most essential and the 10 least essential skills perceived to be mandatory competencies for successful administration in higher education.

General Findings

1. Research from this study indicated that the average age of the academic administrator at the dean's level and above is 51 years. The administrator has been employed at 3.1 institutions of higher education. For those young administrators aspiring to be deans or vice presidents or even presidents, one can conclude that such positions will not be quick in coming and that the administrator must be prepared to move to more than one or two institutions during his/her academic life.

2. Almost 80% of the academic administrators hold Ph.D. degrees, while 14.6% hold the Ed.D. degree. The deans of arts and sciences are the largest administrative group to hold the Ph.D. (98.3%). A higher percentage of women (19%) hold the Ed.D. degree than the Ph.D. (7.4%). The business-related degree has not yet manifested itself as an important degree for an administrator in higher education to hold. One can conclude from these findings

that the Ph.D. degree is still the most desirable degree to hold when seeking an administrative position in higher education. Women interested in administration in higher education could facilitate their career progress by obtaining the Ph.D. degree.

3. The administrators surveyed in this study have significant teaching and administrative experience. They have reported 14.7 years of experience in the teaching area and 14.5 years of administrative experience. One can conclude from this finding that the possibility of attaining an administrative position at the dean's level or higher will usually require a significant amount of experience at either the teaching or the administrative levels.

4. The number of women administrators at the dean's level and above at state universities and land-grant colleges is very low. In the total population of 576 administrators only 37 (.06%) were women. Apparently, it is still quite difficult for women to secure administrative positions at large state universities and land-grant colleges. Women without significant experience in administration might wish to consider other types of institutions for entry level or mid-management administrative positions before applying to the state univeristy or land-grant institution.

5. More females hold administrative positions at predominantly black institutions than do females at predominantly white institutions. At predominantly white

institutions 92.5% of the administrators are male and 7.5% are female. At the predominantly black institutions 78.1% of the administrators are male, while 21.9% are female. One can conclude from these statistics that the dominant role of the woman in black society is being perpetuated in the educational arena. Such statistics also suggest that black institutions could be demonstrating a greater commitment to equal opportunity and affirmative action goals, and that women interested in management could be afforded a greater opportunity for administrative positions at the dean's level and above at predominantly black institutions.

Skill Findings

Items included on the Administrative Skills Opinionnaire were functional skill statements organized under specific administrative processes in higher education. From the ratings assigned to each skill, it has been possible to identify the 10 absolutely essential and the 10 least essential skills for successful higher education administration. It is interesting to note that no skills received an overall rating of not essential. Therefore, one can conclude that the administrative population perceived all 90 skills listed on the opinionnaire to be at least desirable, but not essential.

The top 10 absolutely essential skills, in the overall ranked order are:

1. Maintaining the high standards of ethics, honesty, and integrity in implementing the goals of the institution.

2. Being honest, open, and dependable in dealing with subordinates.

3. Possessing the ability to speak, read, write, and express thoughts in a clear, coherent manner.

4. Demonstrating knowledge of institutional resources such as time, personnel, funds, materials, and other facilities, to implement programs.

5. Being open to new ideas and suggestions and being able to adjust to meet new situations.

6. Possessing stability, objectivity, and composure in times of stress.

7. Being able to think well on one's feet when faced with unexpected or disturbing events in large group meetings.

8. Appplying both concepts of fairness and techniques for personnel appraisal related to compensation, promotion in rank, and awarding of tenure.

9. Having the combination of diplomacy, firmness, and self-confidence to implement planning decisions with a minimum of institutional disruption.

10. Being able to deal with frustrations without becoming hostile or defensive toward others.

There were two highly significant findings in the rankings of the 10 absolutely essential skills. First, no skills in the financial management process were identified as an absolutely essential skill. This is highly contradictory to the findings provided in the literature review, which named financial concerns as the second most essential skill area. The deans of arts and sciences were the only administrative group to name a skill in the financial area among the most essential skills. The skill named was "planning, managing, and monitoring one's budget in the most effective manner possible." However, administrators over 60 years of age rated the skill "demonstrating a thorough understanding of funding methods utilized by one's state when appropriating funds for higher education" as an essential skill. In addition, issues dealing with funding were important to those administrators with more years of faculty experience and to administrators who had been employed at the greater number of institutions. Administrators from predominantly black institutions were more interested in funding issues than were administrators from white institutions and administrators from institutions perceived to be both state universities and land-grant colleges expressed a high level of concern with funding. Finally, administrators with 11 to 20+ years of administrative experience ranked seeking sources of external funding as an essential skill, yet administrators with 1 to 10 years experience did not value the ability so

highly. Also, those administrators from institutions perceived to be both state universities and land-grant colleges placed a high priority on budgetary concerns.

Secondly, the significant emphasis placed upon teaching and scholarship, both from the literature review and from the demographic data generated from the respondents, themselves, was not supported in the skill rankings. In fact, teaching and scholarship were given very low priorities by the respondents, as will be discussed later. One can conclude from the ranking of the top 10 absolutely essential skills that academic administrators are more interested in overcoming stress and frustrations, while treating others with care and consideration than they are in proving themselves to be teachers or scholars.

The 10 least essential skills in their overall ranked order are:

1. Actively demonstrating proposal and grant writing abilities.

2. Demonstrating a commitment to business and industry sectors through the training and academic preparation of students for professional and technical fields.

3. Having a thorough understanding of all offices within the Student Affairs Division and the contributions of those services to institutional goals.

4. Possessing knowledge about the economics of education related to other societal needs and priorities.

5. Providing on-going support for alumni activities.

6. Consistently setting an example to the institutional community as a scholar, researcher, and expert in one's academic discipline.

7. Being recognized as a scholar in one's field via publishing, consulting, speech-making, or teaching activities.

8. Possessing knowledge of the current legal status in higher education nationally and keeping informed of developing legal trends in higher education.

9. Interpreting, formulating, executing, and supporting, to the best of one's ability, legislative policies and guidelines.

10. Assisting staff in the revisions of preliminary drafts of area budgets as needed to become functional within the institution.

Implications

Based on the results of this study, there are a number of implications for optimizing successful administration in higher education. The following implications are presented:

1. There exists a need for high-level administrative and management skills for those who will lead institutions of higher education in the 1980s. Training

programs for administrators in higher education must begin to address these needs through practical "hands-on" learning experiences for the administrator-in-training. The administrative internship or practicum in higher education administration should become an essential component of programs leading to the doctoral degree in higher education administration.

2. Graduate-level programs in the field of higher education administration need to be redesigned to encompass the entire campus, not just one or two areas of concern.

3. Administrators of graduate programs in higher education need to devise ways to measure competencies in the conceptual, technical, and human skills areas. Such an assessment could be utilized in the screening of students for doctoral programs in higher education administration and in determining the potential of students to become successful administrators in higher education.

4. Sabbatical leave programs in which administration is viewed as a discipline should be made available to staff and faculty. Potential administrators should be provided opportunities to develop mentoring relationships with well known administrators in the field of higher education.

5. Attention should be given to career paths within institutions to find ways of promoting people from one level of responsibility to another without constant costs in time

and money.

6. Special emphasis in the selection of administrators should be provided--emphasis which focuses on skill level rather than on academic preparation, only.

7. Because of the very low ratings given to the areas of teaching and scholarship by the respondents, it is believed that less emphasis should be given to teaching and scholarly activities as prime pre-requisites to management in higher education. While the literature review did support the concepts of teaching and scholarship in academic administration, the practitioner's opinion did not concur. Scholarship will have to blend with specific skill development in the communicative, interpersonal and intrapersonal, and self-awareness domains.

Summary

If institutions of higher education are going to find creative, practical solutions to the problems that lie ahead, a new type of leadership will have to emerge. Administration in institutions of higher education will have to become a blending of management and scholarship, with serious consideration being given to the development of strong campus leadership. Academic management, a concept of administration which employs the abilities of combining objective resources with subjective personnel expertise, will have to become a respectable component of the academic community.

The preparation and continued development of academic administrators will have to focus on training which encompasses specific skill development. Too often administrators of institutions of higher education are generalists, with very good instincts and abilities to learn on-the-job. Such a haphazard process of administrator development will not suffice for the manager of the postsecondary institution in the 1980s. Instead, the modern administrator must be knowledgeable in the areas of resource and people management and must seek to enhance the development of skills that will facilitate successful administration in higher education.

Administrator effectiveness can be enhanced by the development of skills through training and practice. Too often, chief academic officers, who are usually recruited from the faculty ranks, come to their offices ill-prepared for the day-to-day realities that face them as institutional managers. It behooves the academic administrator who would be optimally successful, to assess his/her administrative strengths and skills to develop those areas in which he/she is deficient.

Leadership skills for the 1980s should be developed particularly in the areas of: (a) modern administrative techniques and principles; (b) human relations skills (interpersonal/group and intrapersonal/individual);

(c) communicating (speaking, writing, and reading); (d) people and resource management; (e) self-awareness; (f) faculty and staff personnel matters (compensation, selection, and promotion issues); and (g) decision making.

Effective, successful leaders are not born; they are made. An analysis of what makes an effective administrator, combined with a realistic appraisal of issues to be faced by the administrator of the 1980s, should provide the groundwork for the training and development of administrators in the field of higher education.

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